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ABSTRACT

The traditionally direct route from high school to full-time work for most students has given way to a variety of paths. The Academy for Educational Development's National Institute for Work and Learning (AED/NIWL) undertook a 4-year study of school-to-work transition education reform. The study focused on identifying useful models for and the impact of school-to-work transition reform initiatives. A number of activities carried out the study: a comprehensive review and synthesis of the literature; the commissioning of a series of papers on critical issues; the convening of a national conference; 14 case studies of exemplary school-to-work transition initiatives; and the dissemination of diverse products to the research, policy, and education communities. This volume, the third in a series of four, describes the study's research design and methodology. The study's research design consisted of a framework that outlines the relationships among the many contexts within which school-to-work programs and systems operate, the design and implementation of these reforms, and the outcomes produced for organizations and students. Case-study data, collected during site visits to each of the 14 programs in 1993 or 1994, were obtained through individual interviews with many different stakeholders; focus group discussions; observation of classrooms, meetings, and work sites; and document analysis. (LMI)

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STUDY OF SCHOOL-TO-WORK

REFORM INITIATIVES

FINAL TECHNICAL RESEARCH REPORT

VOLUME III

TECHNICAL APPENDIX: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

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FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT
VOLUME III
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C. RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this study was to provide extensive information on the nature and impact of school-to-work transition reform initiatives, providing critical lessons learned from model programs so that others could adapt these exemplary systems and strategies to their local circumstances and conditions. The major research questions that were examined focused on the planning and design, implementation, and impact of school-to-work transition reforms. A number of activities were undertaken to carry out the study, including: a comprehensive review and synthesis of the state of the art on school-to-work transitions; the commissioning of a series of papers on critical issues; the convening of a national conference; fourteen case studies of exemplary school-to-work transition reform initiatives; a cross-case comparison of the fourteen case studies; and the dissemination of diverse products to the research, policy, and educational communities.

The primary aim of the study was to obtain firsthand information about exemplary instances of school-to-work transition reform. To accomplish this, AED/NIWL conducted case studies in fourteen communities across the United States. The research team sought to learn about the contexts in which reform occurred, its planning and design, implementation, and impact, especially on students.

More specifically, the study focused on the following.

Contexts of reform:
- student population served
- previous school-to-work transition programs
- major characteristics of the local labor market
- rates and patterns of employment among local populations
- current economic climate and significant trends
- political and social climate
- demographic trends

Planning and design
- process of designing the reform
- process of planning academic, work, transition/information components
- basis of the reform design in research
- target group of reform
- identity of key players and their roles
- representation of business interests
- representation of school interests
- representation of youth-serving organizations
- representation of employment and training programs
- representation of parents
- representation of students
- impact of planning process on program design

Structure of reform
- overall purpose
- specific goals
- key components
- relationship of goals to components
- organizational structure
- management
- staffing
- numbers and characteristics of students served
- ways the reform differs from previous practice
- roles played by business, schools, employment and training programs, youth-serving agencies

Implementation
- principal incentives
- major barriers
- strategies for addressing barriers

Collaboration
- process of initiating cooperation between business and schools
- nature of collaboration in implementation
- other organizations party to the collaboration

Student competencies
- knowledge and skills required of students
- process for developing these standards
- process for assessing students

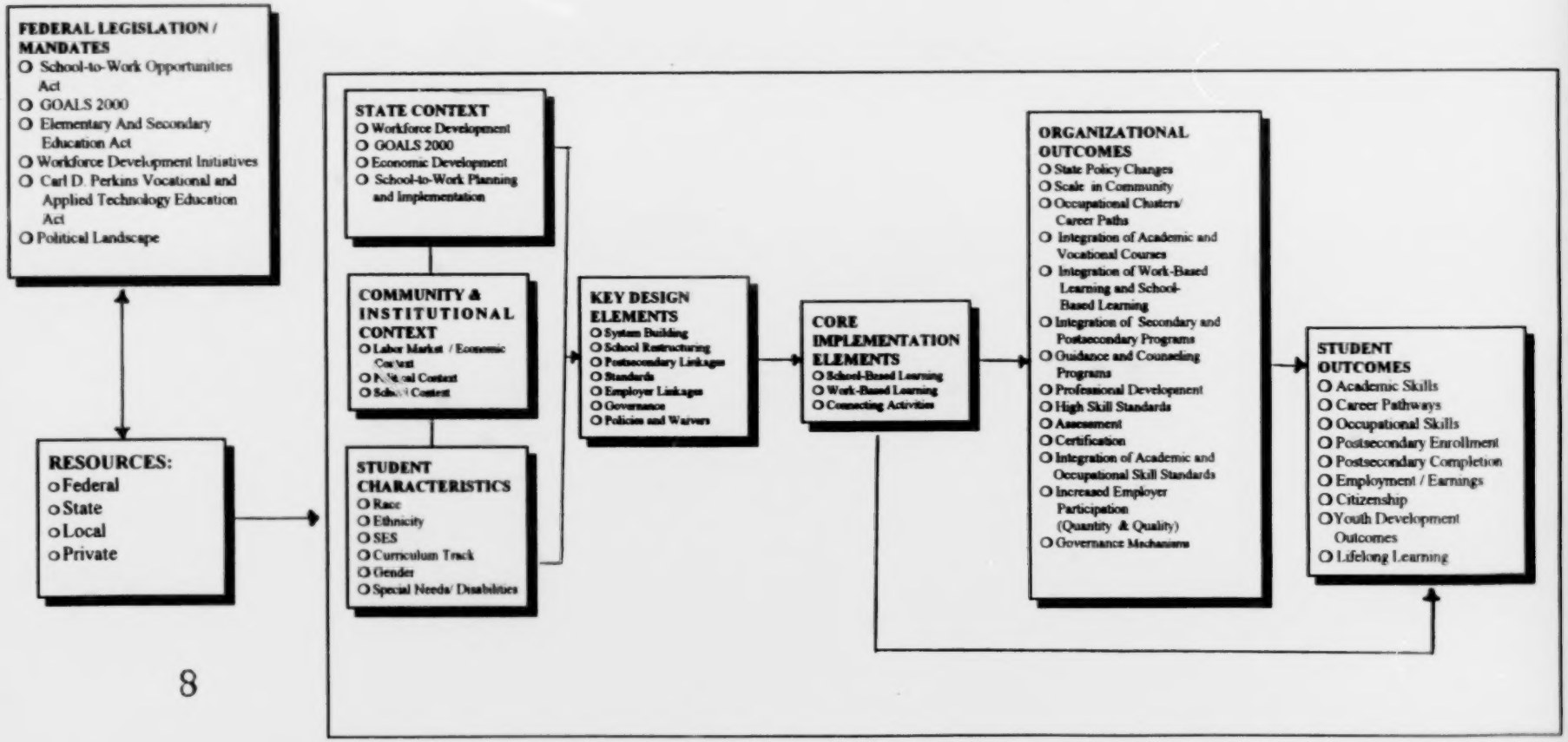
Curriculum
- scope and content of curriculum
- academic, vocational, and transition elements, and their interrelationship
- process of developing the curriculum
- curriculum development roles of schools, employers, students, parents
- pedagogy

Resources
- extra funds obtained for the reform
- other resources required to implement the program
- application of research and other information in implementing the reform

Impact and outcomes
- process for assessing the impact of the reform
- process for assessing academic knowledge and job-related skills
- process for developing the assessment strategies
- impact of the reform on student academic performance and employment
- impact of the reform on schools
- impact of the reform on business
- impact of the reform on other collaborating organizations

The basis for identifying the critical factors for the overall study was a conceptual framework, illustrated in Figure 1. The framework is based on research about school reform and school-to-work transition programs; literature on effective schools and school innovation; the extensive experience of AED/NIWL with school restructuring, program implementation, and technical assistance; and our involvement in designing, implementing, managing, evaluating, and providing technical assistance to national and local programs aimed at

Figure 1
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL-TO-WORK



improving educational, social, and career development outcomes for students, especially those who are disadvantaged.

The framework in Figure 1 outlines the relationships among the many contexts within which school-to-work programs and systems operate, the design and implementation of these reform, and the outcomes produced for organizations and students. The first column, outside the square that contains the other components of the framework, illustrates how federal legislative and political activities, as well as public and private resources, influence the context within which school-to-work reform occurs, constraining, supporting, and shaping the progress of reform. The second column illustrates three other aspects of context: the characteristics of the state, the community, and the student population within which a reform is initiated. These components include economic, political, legal, social, and demographic factors that modify, support, or inhibit change. The third column represents the key elements in the design of school-to-work reform: system building, school restructuring, postsecondary linkages, standards, employer linkages, governance, and policies, and waivers. The fourth column illustrates the three core elements of implementation: school-based learning, work-based learning, and connecting activities. The fifth column summarizes the multiplicity of outcomes for organizations--including states, local governments, nonprofit and public agencies, businesses, schools, and colleges--that school-to-work reform may produce. The final column illustrates the outcomes that school-to-work reform intends to produce for students, outcomes that reflect lifelong development in career, education, and citizenship.

The framework reflected the major categories of research questions, providing a basis

for addressing all the issues raised related to the context, design, implementation, and impact of school-to-work reform initiatives. The framework also served as the basis for identifying issues to address in the commissioned papers and at the national conference. It guided the state of the art literature review and the design of the case studies. In addition to the general components in the framework, the detailed specification of the elements within each component served as the basis for the development of interview guides and protocols for the case studies.

D. METHODOLOGY

In order to obtain firsthand information about exemplary instances of school-to-work transition reform, AED/NIWL conducted case studies in fourteen communities across the United States. The major research questions that guided the study focused on the nature and impact of school-to-work transition reform initiatives. The research team sought to learn about the contexts in which reform occurred, its planning and design, implementation, and impact, especially on students.

Sample Selection

In selecting fourteen communities, AED/NIWL sought out school-to-work programs that were different and somewhat innovative. We looked for evidence of reform both in curriculum and in delivery of education, including the location and scheduling of learning. Ultimately, we hoped that an examination of exemplary programs would lead us to the identification of the elements that compose effective systems for school-to-work transition.

Initially, the research team cast the net for nominations broadly, reviewing the school-to-work literature and soliciting recommendations from a wide range of individuals, including the project advisory group and OERI study group. In all, about 200 programs made up this initial nomination pool. AED/NIWL staff wrote or telephoned these programs, of which about sixty provided additional information.

As the first step in winnowing out nominees, the research team eliminated those that had already been evaluated by another research organization.[1] Secondly, programs were reviewed in order to eliminate those that were (a) not examples of education reform and (b) not primarily secondary school reforms. Thirdly, programs operating less than two years were eliminated.

Of the remaining sites, we narrowed our focus to those that showed evidence of (a) some type of strong connection with business, as well as (b) some degree of effectiveness, or promise of effectiveness, in terms of positive outcomes for students. From among this group we selected a group of sites that offered variety in terms of:

- geography (urban, suburban, rural)
- program level (school-based, district-wide, regional, statewide)
- setting (workplace, school building, postsecondary institution)
- student population groups
- delivery strategy (career academies, school-based enterprises, variety of business roles, etc.)

Subsequently, we added two sites that met all our criteria and that primarily served students with disabilities. The rationale for this step was two-fold: first, to ensure that the research was inclusive in terms of target populations, and second, because the field of special education has a long history in providing transition services to students, it offers a body of experience from which, as our case studies have confirmed, other educators have a great deal to learn.

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[1] It was also decided not to study any apprenticeship programs, because a number of organizations were engaged at the time in examinations of youth apprenticeships.

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AED/NIWL submitted the list of potential sites for case studies to the OERI, along with program descriptions, a matrix of the programs by criteria, and staff recommendations. From this process of review and consultation, fourteen were ultimately selected:

- Mt. Edgecumbe High School (Sitka, Alaska)
- Metro Tech Vocational-Technical School (Phoenix, Arizona)
- East San Gabriel Regional Occupational Program (East San Gabriel, California)
- Pasadena Graphic Arts Academy (Pasadena, California)
- Performance-Based Diploma Program (Ft. Pierce, Florida)
- Aviation Magnet (Louisville, Kentucky)
- Baltimore Commonwealth (Baltimore, Maryland)
- Education for Employment (Kalamazoo County, Michigan)
- Rothsay High School (Rothsay, Minnesota)
- Patterson Career Center (Dayton, Ohio)
- Youth Transition Program (State of Oregon)
- Roy High School (Roy, Utah)
- Comprehensive Employment Work and Transition (CEWAT), (Charlottesville,Virginia)
- Student Career Opportunity Paths in Education (SCOPE), (Veradale, Washington)

Data Collection

An advantage of case study methodology, characterized by intensive and focused field work, is that it provides for the collection of a rich amount of data from which to draw a comprehensive portrait of a reform initiative and its dynamics. Preparation for the case studies required four major activities: protocol development, review of documents and materials, staff

training, and site selection. Semi-structured, open-ended interview protocols were developed to guide the interviews and focus groups, and observation guides to document activities and events observed by the research team. Copies of these guides are provided in Volume IV of this Final Technical Report.

The focus of each case study was a four-to-five-day site visit by a two-person case study team. In order to gain a complete perspective, we collected similar information from multiple sources and used multiple collection strategies. While visiting each community, the teams interviewed individuals, conducted focus groups and group interviews, observed aspects of the initiatives in action, collected documents, and, where possible, gathered existing data describing or assessing the impact of the initiative on students. Each team interviewed individual representatives of business, school districts, high schools, postsecondary institutions, and local agencies, as well as students, instructors, administrators, counselors, and parents. (Every team meet with representatives of every category, although the position of those interviewed might vary. For example, teams interviewed high school principals, district superintendents, and/or deputy district or school administrators at every site. Teams interviewed postsecondary representatives at all the sites articulated with a college or university, but depending on the site, these individuals might be tech prep coordinators, deans for continuing education, assistants to the president, department chairs, even the president.) Every team also conducted focus groups, usually parent focus groups and student focus groups, and occasionally, groups of service providers (i.e. counselors, teachers) as well. Teams devoted extensive amounts of time to observation in a variety of classrooms, work sites, and meetings of advisory groups and executive councils. The documents collected included curriculum samples, program reports, student career guidance materials, portfolio and

competency rating samples, local newspaper and newsletter clippings, meeting minutes, internal memoranda, internal evaluation reports, and statistical summaries.

Data Analysis

The research team for each site visit analyzed the field work notes, using the principle of data triangulation to ensure that every finding was affirmed by more than one source. The research teams wrote 25-30 page case studies of each initiative, describing their findings about its design, implementation, impact, and barriers faced by program developers (see Volume II). These case study reports reflect the emphasis on description rather than on evaluation. The primary purpose of AED/NIWL's study was to document and analyze useful models and practices from which others could learn as they sought to reform education in their communities. Having determined that the sites offered an exemplary approach, the direction of the case study analysis therefore was to describe as meaningfully as possible the operation and impact of the school-to-work reform, rather than to evaluate its individual components or the relative merits of the sites. From the description of the reform, the research team sought to draw the critical elements of that initiative, so that practitioners reviewing the case study could adapt elements to their local circumstances.

Throughout the case study process, the research team convened to discuss cross-cutting elements, relating and synthesizing the findings of their individual case studies. The teams considered the elements identified as critical at each site, explored similarities across sites, defined variations, and arrived at agreement that an element was present and important in at least five or six sites. The result of these discussions was a cross-case comparison report (see Volume I). Its basic purpose is to document and analyze the critical elements common to many or all of the communities studied, so as to make their models and practices accessible

and useful to others seeking to reform education in their communities. Despite the variety of the communities, our study has not encountered the usual frustrations facing those who compare different programs or initiatives that have little in common. The diversity of the fourteen sites only makes more vivid the elements that they share.

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